

Message Text

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

PAGE 01 BRUSSE 01881 281659Z
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SCA-01 INR-07 CIAE-00 PER-01 OC-06
CCO-00 /028 W
-----010211 075243 /63
R 281621Z FEB 77
FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9161

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE BRUSSELS 1881

E. O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: AMGT, PFOR, US, BE
SUBJECT: ANTWERP CONSULATE GENERAL

1. I UNDERSTAND THAT CONSIDERATION IS ONCE AGAIN BEING GIVEN TO CLOSING THE CONSULATE GENERAL IN ANTWERP. APPARENTLY IT IS FELT THAT THE FUNCTIONS OF THE CONSULATE GENERAL IN ANTWERP COULD BE PERFORMED BY EMBASSY BRUSSELS AND THAT SIGNIFICANT FUNDS WOULD THUS BE SAVED.

2. THE MAIN REASON FOR NOT SHUTTING THE CONSULATE GENERAL IN ANTWERP, AS I SEE IT, IS TO RETAIN U.S. PRESENCE IN FLANDERS.

3. BELGIUM IS DIVIDED INTO TWO SEPARATE AND FREQUENTLY ANTAGONISTIC LINGUISTIC GROUPS -- THE FLEMINGS IN THE NORTH WHO SPEAK DUTCH AND THE WALLOONS IN THE SOUTH WHO SPEAK FRENCH. UNTIL RECENTLY, THE WALLOONS DOMINATED BELGIUM POLITICALLY, ECONOMICALLY, AND SOCIALLY. THIS PATTERN IS CHANGING RAPIDLY, DUE LARGELY TO POST-WAR DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC TRENDS. TODAY THE FLEMINGS MAKE UP ABOUT 60 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION OF BELGIUM AND THEY CONTROL AN INCREASINGLY LARGE SHARE OF BELGIAN INDUSTRY. CONSEQUENTLY, POLITICAL POWER HAS SHIFTED TO FLANDERS. TODAY THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT IS DOMINATED BY THE FLEMISH WING OF THE CHRISTIAN AND THE LIBERAL PARTIES.

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

PAGE 02 BRUSSE 01881 281659Z

SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES ARE BEING FELT SOMEWHAT MORE SLOWLY BUT INEXORABLY. THESE CHANGES IN THE RELATIVE POSITIONS OF THE TWO LINGUISTIC GROUPS HAVE PRODUCED TENSIONS THAT AFFECT EVERY FACET OF LIFE IN BELGIUM AND INTRUDE INTO EVERY IMPORTANT POLICY ISSUE.

4. BELGIANS ARE IN THE PROCESS OF DETERMINING HOW THEY

WILL MOVE POLITICALLY FROM A UNITARY TO A FEDERALIST NATION. THIS DEBATE IS THE CENTRAL FEATURE OF BELGIAN POLITICAL LIFE. HOW IT IS CONDUCTED AND HOW IT WILL BE RESOLVED IS OF VITAL IMPORTANCE TO ALL BELGIANS. THE TWO LINGUISTIC GROUPS AND THE VARIOUS POLITICAL GROUPS WITHIN EACH ARE MANEUVERING TO DEFINE THE FEDERAL STRUCTURE TO THEIR BENEFIT.

5. IN THIS DYNAMIC SITUATION, THE FLEMINGS WOULD CONSIDER A U.S. DECISION TO CLOSE ANTWERP AS AN INEXPLICABLE AFFRONT. BRUSSELS IS ESSENTIALLY A FRENCH-SPEAKING CITY AND FLEMINGS FEEL THAT BRUSSELS IS NOT THEIR CAPITAL. THEY LOOK MORE TO ANTWERP, THE LARGEST AND MOST IMPORTANT CITY. THE FLEMINGS ARE PROUD THAT ALL OF THE MAJOR FRIENDS AND ALLIES OF BELGIUM AND MANY OTHER COUNTRIES HAVE CONSULATES IN ANTWERP. THE FLEMINGS COULD NEVER BE CONVINCED THAT THE MOST POWERFUL COUNTRY IN THE WORLD COULD NOT AFFORD TO MAINTAIN ITS CONSULAR OFFICE IN ANTWERP AND WOULD RESENT THE U.S. FOR CONSIDERING THEM TOO UNIMPORTANT TO SPEND THE SMALL AMOUNT OF MONEY NEEDED TO MAINTAIN A PRESENCE IN ANTWERP.

6. PRIME MINISTER TINDEMANS, WHOSE POLITICAL BASE IS ANTWERP, WOULD CERTAINLY COME UNDER ATTACK FROM FLANDERS IF THE U.S. WERE TO PULL OUT OF ANTWERP. WE COULD EXPECT THE TINDEMANS GOVERNMENT TO URGE THE U.S. NOT TO CLOSE THE ANTWERP CONSULATE GENERAL.

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

PAGE 03 BRUSSE 01881 281659Z

7. IN THE EARLY 1960S THE FLEMINGS BECAME AWARE THAT THE U.S. WAS CONSIDERING CLOSING ANTWERP. THEY REACTED SHARPLY. BELGIANS OF ALL LEVELS, INCLUDING THE MAYOR OF ANTWERP, THE GOVERNOR OF ANTWERP PROVINCE, AND THE FOREIGN MINISTER, PETITIONED THE EMBASSY, THE DEPARTMENT, AND THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE NOT TO LEAVE ANTWERP. I HAVE NO DOUBT BUT THAT THE FLEMISH REACTION WOULD BE EQUALLY FORCEFUL TODAY.

8. IN MY JUDGMENT, CLOSING ANTWERP WOULD HURT OUR LONG-TERM RELATIONS WITH THE FLEMISH COMMUNITY AND LEADERSHIP. AS THE MEN WHO DETERMINE THE BELGIAN POSITIONS IN NATO AND THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY AND ON INTERNATIONAL ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE TO THE U.S. WILL BE INCREASINGLY FLEMINGS, DAMAGE TO OUR RELATIONS WITH THE FLEMINGS WOULD HAVE A DIRECT IMPACT ON OUR ABILITY TO INFLUENCE BELGIAN POLICIES.

9. THERE ARE OTHER ARGUMENTS AGAINST CLOSING ANTWERP.

A. THE ANTWERP CONSULATE GENERAL HANDLES A HEAVY LOAD OF CONSULAR WORK. IT ISSUES MORE THAN ONE-THIRD OF THE BELGIAN NON-IMMIGRANT VISAS. THIS WORK COULD BE HANDLED IN BRUSSELS BUT, AS THE CONSULAR SECTION OF EMBASSY BRUSSELS IS ALREADY STRETCHED, IT COULD NOT TAKE ON MORE WORK WITHOUT EQUIVALENT ADDITIONAL PERSONNEL. BRINGING IN ADDITIONAL PERSONNEL WOULD NECESSITATE MOVING THE BRUSSELS CONSULATE TO A MORE SPACIOUS, MORE COSTLY, AND PROBABLY LESS-CONVENIENT LOCATION. CONSOLIDATING THE CONSULAR FUNCTIONS OF THE ANTWERP CONSULATE GENERAL AND THE CONSULAR SECTION OF EMBASSY BRUSSELS, THUS, WOULD RESULT IN LITTLE IF ANY SHORT-TERM SAVINGS.

B. THE POLITICAL REPORTING AND COMMERCIAL WORK NOW BEING DONE BY THE ANTWERP CONSULATE GENERAL COULD BE HANDLED BY THE EMBASSY. HOWEVER, THIS WOULD REQUIRE AN INCREASE OF THE EMBASSY'S STAFF AND, EVEN THEN, THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

PAGE 04 BRUSSE 01881 281659Z

WORK WOULD BE DONE LESS EFFICIENTLY AND LESS EFFECTIVELY.

C. THE ANTWERP CONSULATE GENERAL HOUSES ELISO, THE DEPARTMENT'S FREIGHT FORWARDING AGENT FOR EUROPE AND PARTS OF AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST. IF THE CONSULATE GENERAL'S DOORS WERE CLOSED, ELISO PRESUMABLY WOULD NEED TO SEEK A CONSULAR UMBRELLA ELSEWHERE, THUS DISRUPTING ITS ACTIVITIES.

10. BUT, TO REITERATE, THE MAJOR CONSEQUENCES OF PULLING OUT OF ANTWERP WOULD BE TO CAUSE DEEP RESENTMENT AMONG THE FLEMINGS, EMBARRASS THE TINDEMANS' GOVERNMENT, AND HARM U.S. INTERESTS IN BELGIUM. RENNER

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: DIPLOMATIC MISSION CLOSING
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 28-Feb-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977BRUSSE01881
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770069-0346
Format: TEL
From: BRUSSELS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t1977024/aaaaadnd.tel
Line Count: 153
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: d0314bc6-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 23-Nov-2004 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3316339
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ANTWERP CONSULATE GENERAL
TAGS: AMGT, PFOR, US, BE
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/d0314bc6-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009